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ASIA - PACIFIC CONSULTATION ON EAST TIMOR

Concern about East Timor continues to grow in Asia and the Pacific. As in other parts of the world. sorrow at the enormous suffering and loss of freedoms suffered by the people of East Timor since the Indonesian invasion and takeover in 1975 is accompanied by deep anger at the failure of governments and the international political system to redress the injustice at the heart of the isssue.

Solidarity groups now function in Hong Kong and Japan. an Asian regional newsletter on Timor is circulating. East Timorese toured Japan last year and the issue is on the agenda of bodies such as the Christian Conference of Asia, the Asian Students Association and regional Catholic Justice and Peace Commissions. Cardinal Sin of the Philippines recently wrote a strong letter of solidarity to the local Church in East Timor.

South Pacific island women formed friendships with their Timorese sisters during the Nairobi women's conference. Timorese leaders such as Mgr da Costa Lopes have toured parts of the Pacific and the issue has been on the agenda of bodies such as the NFIP and the Pacific Conference of Churches for some years. Concern and support work in Australia and New Zealand goes back many years now.

So far, however, very few of the individuals and organisations from Asia, Oceania and the South Pacific who have been working in support of East Timor have had an opportunity to meet one another and sit down together to share and reflect. Consequently our region does not yet enjoy the common strategy. sense of movement and friendship (and the strength deriving from that) which characterises the European network who now meet together at least once a year.

Christians in Solidarity with East Timor (CISET) has therefore initiated the first Asia-Pacific Consultation on East Timor.

This consultation will be held in Manila, the Philippines, 15-17 November 1987.

Objectives

The principal aims of the consultation are:

1. to share information on all aspects of the issue;
2. to analyse regional and international geopolitical factors bearing on the issue;
3. to review actions taken within the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere and to identify needs;
4. to decide on a regional strategy, short and long term, and organisational methods;
5. to develop personal links and collective commitment.

Participants

The consultation is for those involved with the issue. That is it is primarily a working meeting for activists, not a public conference. The date, 15-17 November, has been chosen to coincide with an NFIP Conference to be held in the Philippines 4-14 November. Hopefully this arrangement will reduce costs as it is expected some of the NFIP participants (from the South Pacific islands in particular) will also be involved directly with East Timor and may be able to stay on for the Timor consultation.

As convenor, CISET will issue direct invitations to about 30 people. Others may care to apply. Every effort will be made to ensure adequate Timorese representation.

Finances

Generally speaking it is proposed that participants from Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand will pay their own way or seek funding support within their own country.

As Pacific island participants are furtherest from the Philippines travel-wise it is planned to seek funding for them within Australia and New Zealand and to ask participants from Asia and Oceania if they can subsidise their Pacific partners.

Details on such matters as accommodation in the Philippines have yet to be finalised. It is hoped a meeting venue will be donated and that at least some of the participants can be billeted out.

Organisers

Christians in Solidarity with East Timor (CISET) will serve as convenors for this first consultation. CISET will be assisted by Philippino organisations on matters such as choice of meeting venue, accommodation, collecting participants etc. Responsibility for background briefings, speakers, finalisation of the agenda and supply of other resources rests with CISET.

Further enquiries

Enquiries should be directed to:

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"While East Timor has received increased notice in recent years, it is nonetheless undeniable that this issue exists far from the great political debates of the day, and is all too likely to be overlooked as pressing national and international issues compete for public attention. East Timor's remoteness and isolation from the outside world make its inhabitants all the more vulnerable. It is therefore crucial that the East Timor tragedy be highlighted whenever possible, and that efforts continue to enhance the dignity of life in East Timor and the right of the territory's inhabitants to live in peace and freedom".

US Bishops Conference, March 1987